

THE REAL RACE PROBLEM

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[Professor Franz Boas, who writes the leading article this month, is a member of the Department of Anthropology in Columbia University. The editor of *Science* reports that the leading scientists of America regard this department of Columbia as the strongest in the country. This gives a peculiar weight to Dr. Boas' words, which were first delivered at the Second National Negro Conference in May, 1910.]

The essential problem before us is founded on the presence of two entirely distinct human types in the same community, and relates to the best possible correlation of the activities of these two types. On the whole, the answer to this problem has been based on the assumption of the superiority of the one type and the inferiority of the other. The first question to be answered by scientific investigation is, in how far the Negro type may be considered the inferior, the white type as the superior.

THE NEGRO NOT INFERIOR

The anthropologist recognizes that the Negro and the white represent the two most divergent types of mankind. The differences in color, form of hair, form of face, are known to all of us. Other differences, better known to anthropologists, are those in the proportions of the limbs and of the trunk of the body, and in the size of the brain.

When we consider inferiority and superiority from a general biological point of view, it must be interpreted as meaning that one type is nearer to certain ancestral forms than another. In this sense, the anthropologist must say that in certain respects the Negro resembles the hypothetical ancestral forms of man more than does the European; while in other respects the European shows greater similarity to the supposed ancestral form. Among the Negro race it is particularly the form of the face that reminds us of the ancestral forms of man, while in regard to the proportions of the body, and particularly the length of the limbs, the Negro is more remote from ancestral forms than is the European.

On the whole, the morphological characteristics of the two races show rather a specialized development in different directions than a higher development in the one race as compared with the other.

Ordinarily, however, the question of inferiority and superiority is formulated in a different manner, based essentially on the capacity of mental achievement; and much stress is laid on two points—the lesser size of the brain of the Negro, and the supposed shortness of the period of development of the Negro child.

SIZE OF BRAIN

It is true that the average size of the Negro brain is slightly smaller than the average size of the brain of the white race; but it must be borne in mind that a wide range of brain-forms and brain-sizes occur among the white race, beginning with very small brains and extending to very large ones; that the same is true of the Negro race, and that the difference between the averages of the two races is exceedingly small as compared with the range of variability found in either race. Thus it happens that the brain-weights of the bulk of the Negro race and of the bulk of the white race have the same values, with the sole exception that low brain-weights are slightly more frequent among the Negroes, high brain-weights slightly more frequent among the whites.

Elaborate studies of brains of great men, criminals, and normal individuals have proved that the relation between mental ability and brain-weight is rather remote, and that we are not by any means justified in concluding that the larger brain is always the more efficient tool for mental achievement. There is presumably a slight increase of average ability corresponding to a considerable increase in average brain-weight; but this increase is so slight that in a comparison of the mental ability of the Negro race and of the white race, the difference in size of the brain seems quite insignificant.

The second point of which much has been made is the question of the difference in period of development between the two races. It has been claimed that the Negro child develops favorably, but that its development is arrested at an early date. Unfortunately, these statements are not based on careful examination of facts; and while I am unable to refute these views by bringing forward actual anthropometrical statistics bearing upon the subject, I am also not in a position to sustain them by any reliable evidence. The question is an important one, and should receive serious attention.

But even if the observation had been made, its interpretation would not be an easy one without the most painstaking investigation of the social conditions with which the phenomenon is correlated. We know that in the white race the most favorably situated social groups show the most rapid growth in early childhood and an early completion of development; while the poor, who live under more unfavorable social conditions, show a slow and long-continued development, which, however, in

its entirety, does not equal the amount of physiological development attained by better-situated individuals of the same race. It appears, therefore, that the simple fact of an early completion of development does not by any means prove mental inferiority, because the better-situated element of our white population furnishes a disproportionately large number of capable and efficient individuals, as compared to the less favorably situated groups.

The whole anatomical and physiological comparison of the Negro and of the white race may be summed up in the statement that certain differences between the two races are so fundamental that they seem to form two quite distinct groups of the human species, the characteristics of which, notwithstanding the great variability of each race, do not overlap; while, in regard to other characteristics, the differences are so slight that the difference between the two races is insignificant, as compared to the range of variability exhibited in each race by itself; and that there are hardly any anatomical or physiological traits developed in such manner that we are justified in calling one race anatomically or physiologically higher than the other. The existing differences are differences in kind, not in value. This implies that the biological evidence also does not sustain the view, which is so often proposed, that the mental power of the one race is higher than that of the other, although their mental qualities show, presumably, differences analogous to the existing anatomical and physiological differences.

HANDICAP OF SLAVERY

The objection will be raised that the low stage of culture of the African race in many parts of America, as well as in Africa, shows clearly a lack of mental power, because otherwise the Negro race might have developed a civilization similar to that of Europe. In answer to this objection, we must remember that, on the whole, our conception of African conditions is based altogether too much upon the condition of the uneducated descendant of the American Negro slave. Any one who is familiar with ethnological facts will recognize that the conditions under which the American slave population developed is apt to destroy what little culture may have existed. The complete break with the African past; the imposition of labor, in the results of which the slave had no direct interest; the difficulty of assimilating the elements of civilization by which they were surrounded, all tended equally to reduce to a minimum the amount of independent cultural achievement of the group.

On the other hand, the general impression of African conditions is based altogether too much upon our knowledge of the American Negro. It is not sufficiently well known how highly advanced is the industrial and political organization of aboriginal Africa. Villages that have not been rav-

aged by Mohammedan or European slave hunters, and which have enjoyed a period of peace, are characterized by high industrial development.

TRADE WELL ORGANIZED.

Agriculture flourishes; men and women are engaged in pottery making, weaving, blacksmith work, and metal casting; trade between the different villages is well organized; and in many cases the political organization, owing to the force of character of great men, has led to the establishment of states which cover territories comparable in size only to large sections of our American continent. I think it is not saying too much if I state that among the primitive people of the world, the natives of Central Africa are by far the most advanced, and that the type of their civilization belongs to the same level of culture which was found a few thousand years ago all over the western part of the Old World, including Europe and Western Asia.

If the Africans have not shared in the development which, after many vicissitudes, gradually extended from Egypt and Babylonia over the Mediterranean area, and from there later into Northern Europe, this is due to the fact that Africa occupied a much more remote position in relation to these countries, and that the current of civilization was carried with much greater difficulty through the virgin forests and deserts of Africa than along the shores of the Mediterranean and across the forests and meadow lands of Europe.

Thus it may safely be said that there is no anthropological evidence showing inferiority of the Negro race as compared with the white race, although we may assume that differences in mental characteristics of the two races exist.

CASE OF THE MULATTO

The question that confronts us is not alone the question of the mental aptitude of the full-blood Negro, but also the question of the ability, vigor, and adaptability of the mulatto. In the course of time, since the Negro has been imported into America, a very large amount of influx of white blood has taken place, which has had the result that in those parts of the country where the Negro does not form a very great majority, full-bloods are presumably quite rare. Owing to the peculiar manner of development of this mulatto population, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to trace the exact amount of white blood and of Negro blood in the mixed races; but even a cursory examination of the prevalent types of the colored population shows clearly that the mixture is very extended.

Here the point has often been raised that the mulatto population is inferior to either pure race, or, to use the popular form of expression, that they inherit all the evil characteristics of both parental races, and none of their good qualities. It is obvious

that in this exaggerated form the statement is untrue. As a matter of fact, this theory is generally used only so far as it may suit our purposes; and the statement that a mulatto of exceptional ability and strength of character owes his eminence to the white strain in his blood is seriously made without being felt as a contradiction to this theory. Serious attempts have been made to investigate the social and vital characteristics of the mulatto as compared to the Negro race and to the white race; but here again we must recognize with regret that a sound basis for safe conclusions has not been gained yet. It is very difficult to differentiate clearly between those characteristics of the mulatto that are due to the social conditions under which he lives, and those that are due to hereditary causes. In order to determine the actual conditions with any degree of accuracy, extensive investigations would have to be carried through with this specific object in view.

It seems to my mind that the assumption which is generally made is very unlikely, for it ought to be possible to find, either in history or in biology, parallel cases demonstrating the evil effects of intermixture upon mixed types. It seems to my mind that the whole early history of our domesticated animals indicates that mixture has hardly ever had detrimental effect upon the development of varieties. Practically none of our domesticated animals are descendants of a single species. The probable history of our European cattle will illustrate what presumably happened. In all likelihood cattle were first domesticated in Asia and came to Europe in company with a number of tribes that migrated from the East westward. At this period large herds of wild cattle existed in Europe. The herds attracted the wild native bulls, which belonged to a distinct species of cattle, and a gradual mixture of the blood of the domesticated and of the wild cattle took place, which had the effect of modifying the type of the animal that was kept.

MODIFICATION IN TYPE.

In the same way domesticated cattle would from time to time escape and join the wild herds; so that admixture occurred also in the wild species. This gradual modification of the type of both wild and domesticated animals may be observed even at the present time in Siberia and in Central Asia; and a zoological investigation of our domesticated animals has shown that practically in all cases this has been the development of the existing types. It is a peculiarity incident to domestication that intermixture of distinct types is facilitated. Among wild animals mixture of different species is, on the whole, rare; and mixture of distinct varieties of the same species does not ordinarily occur, because each variety has its own local habitat.

If we want to understand analogous conditions in mankind clearly, we must remember that man, in his bodily form and

in his physiological functions, is strictly analogous to domesticated animals. Practically everywhere human culture has advanced so far that the anatomical type of man cannot be compared to that of wild animals, but must be considered as analogous to the type of domesticated animals. This condition has brought it about that intermixture of distinct types has always been easy.

The types of man which were originally strictly localized have not remained so, but extended migrations have been the rule ever since very early times; in fact, as far back as our knowledge of prehistoric archaeology carries us. Therefore we find mixtures between distinct types the world over. For our present consideration the mixed types that occur on the borderland of the Negro races seem particularly interesting. I mention among these the Western people of the Polynesian Islands, who are undoubtedly a mixture of negroid types and of another type related to the Malay, a highly gifted people, which, before European contact, had developed a peculiar and interesting culture of their own. More interesting than these are the inhabitants of the southern borderland of the Sahara.

HOW POPULATIONS WERE MIXED.

In olden times this was the home of the darkest Negro races; but immediately north of them were found people of much lighter complexion, which, in descent, belong to the group of Mediterranean people. They belong to the same group which developed the ancient Egyptian civilization. For long periods these people have made inroads into the Negro territory south of the Sahara, and have established the empire of the Sudan, whose history we can trace about a thousand years back. In this manner a mixed population has developed in many of these regions which has proved exceedingly capable, which has produced a great many men of great power, and which has succeeded in assimilating a considerable amount of Arab culture.

It is quite remarkable to see how, in some of the more remote parts of this country, where intermixture has been very slight, the pure Negro type dominates and has developed exactly the same type of culture which is found in other regions, where the North African type predominates. The development of culture, and the degree of assimilation of foreign elements, depend, in this whole area, not upon the purity of the race, but upon the stability of political conditions, which during long periods have been characterized by an alternation of peaceful development and of warlike conquest.

The history of East Africa, with its extended migrations of people from north to south, is another case illustrating the infusion of foreign blood into the African race without in any way modifying the cultural conditions of the continent, except so

far as the introduction of new inventions is concerned.

MULATTO NOT INFERIOR

I think, therefore, that biological analogy as well as historical evidence do not favor the assumption of any material inferiority of the mulatto. The question, however, deserves a painstaking investigation.

The simple facts that Negroes and Europeans live side by side in our country, that the European receives constant large additions from abroad, while the amount of Negro blood receives no additions from outside, must necessarily lead to the result that the relative number of pure Negroes will become less and less in our country. The gradual process of elimination of the full-blooded Negro may be retarded by legislation, but it cannot possibly be avoided.

It seems to my mind that a very serious misunderstanding of the actual conditions of intermixture between Negro and white prevails in many parts of our country. The fear is often expressed that by intermixture between whites and Negroes the whole mass of the white population might be infused with a certain amount of Negro blood. This is not what has actually occurred, but what would result if unions between white women and Negro men were as frequent as unions between Negro men and white women. As a matter of fact, however, the former type of unions—that of the Negro male and of the white female—are exceedingly few in number as compared to the others. It therefore follows that our mulattoes are almost throughout the offspring of Negro mothers and white fathers. Now, we must remember that the total number of children born in the community depends upon the number of mothers, and that the number of children born of the Negro or mulatto women would be approximately the same, no matter whether the fathers are Negroes, mulattoes, or white men. It thus appears that in all cases where mixture between whites and Negroes occurs, as long as this mixture is predominantly a mixture of white fathers and colored mothers, the relative proportion of Negro blood in the following mixed generation

becomes less, and that therefore a gradually increasing similarity of the two racial types may develop.

I think we may say with safety that the intensity of racial feeling always depends upon two important causes. The one is the relative number of the two races which come into contact. Where one of the races is overwhelmingly in the majority, and the other race is represented by a few individuals only, intensity of race feeling is generally rather slight; while in all cases where both types are so numerous as to form large social divisions, characterized by habits of their own, and representing a strong economic influence, intense race feelings easily develop. These feelings are strongly emphasized by a second consideration: namely, the amount of difference of type.

This is true, at least, in all countries inhabited by north European, particularly by Teutonic, nations. As long as the general emotional state of our society persists—and there is no reason to assume that our general attitude will change to any appreciable degree within a measurable time—it seems obvious that our race problems will become the less intense, the less the difference in type between the different groups of our people, and the less the isolation of certain social groups. From this point of view, it would seem that one aspect of the solution of the Negro problem lies entirely in the hands of the Negro himself. The less Negro society represents a party with its own aims and its own interest distinct from those of the members of the white race, the more satisfactory will be the relation between the races. On the other hand, it would seem that the inexorable conditions of our life will gradually make toward the disappearance of the most distinctive type of Negro, which will again tend to alleviate the acuteness of race feeling. It may seem like a look into a distant future; but an unbiased examination of conditions as they exist at the present time points to the ultimate result of a levelling of the deep distinctions between the two races and a more and more fruitful co-operation.



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